Weekly Compilation of

Presidential Documents

Monday, August 28, 2006
Volume 42—Number 34
Pages 1479–1509

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Editor's Note: The President was in Kennebunkport, ME, on August 25, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains statements, messages, and other Presidential materials released by the White House during the preceding week.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is published pursuant to the authority contained in the Federal Register Act (49 Stat. 500, as amended; 44 U.S.C. Ch. 15), under regulations prescribed by the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register, approved by the President (37 FR 23607; 1 CFR Part 10).

Distribution is made only by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* will be furnished by mail to domestic subscribers for $80.00 per year ($137.00 for mailing first class) and to foreign subscribers for $93.75 per year, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The charge for a single copy is $3.00 ($3.75 for foreign mailing).

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Week Ending Friday, August 25, 2006

The President's Radio Address

August 19, 2006

Good morning. This week I met with my national security, counterterrorism, and economic teams. We've set clear goals: We will defeat the terrorists and expand freedom across the world; we'll protect the American homeland and work tirelessly to prevent attacks on our country; and we will continue to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of America and build a more prosperous future for all our citizens.

On Monday, I visited the Pentagon and the State Department, where we discussed the war on terror, including the recent conflict in Lebanon, a conflict which began with an unprovoked attack by Hizballah on Israel. Thanks to the leadership of Secretary Rice and Ambassador Bolton at the United Nations, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution that will help bring an end to the violence and create a foundation for a sustainable peace.

The resolution calls for a robust international force to deploy to the southern part of Lebanon. This force will help Lebanon's legitimate armed forces restore the sovereignty of its democratic Government over all Lebanese territory and stop Hizballah from acting as a state within a state. The resolution will help make it possible for civilians in both Lebanon and Israel to return home in safety and begin rebuilding their lives without fear of renewed violence and terror.

The United States is now working with our international partners to turn the words of this resolution into action. The conflict in Lebanon is part of a broader struggle between freedom and terror that is unfolding across the region. Terrorists and their sponsors recognize that the Middle East is at a pivotal moment in its history. Freedom has brought hope to millions, and it's helped foster the development of young democracies from Baghdad to Beirut.

Yet these young democracies are still fragile, and the forces of terror are seeking to stop liberty's advance and steer newly free nations to the path of radicalism. The terrorists fear the rise of democracy because they know what it means for the future of their hateful ideology.

It is no coincidence that two nations that are building free societies in the heart of the Middle East, Lebanon and Iraq, are also the scenes of the most violent terrorist activity. We will defeat the terrorists by strengthening young democracies across the broader Middle East.

The way forward will be difficult, and it will require sacrifice and resolve. But America's security depends on liberty's advance in this troubled region, and we can be confident of the outcome because we know the unstoppable power of freedom.

On Tuesday, I went to the National Counterterrorism Center, where I was briefed by the fine professionals who work day and night to protect our Nation from terrorist attacks. Their efforts are vital, as we saw with the recent terrorist plot to destroy airliners headed for America.

I thanked the men and women of the intelligence community for all they did to help the British Government uncover and disrupt this vicious plot. This attempted attack is a reminder to us all: The terrorists remain determined to destroy innocent life on a massive scale, and we must be equally determined to stop them.

On Friday, I met with my economic advisers at Camp David, where we discussed our efforts to keep our economy growing and creating jobs. Our economy has created more than 5.5 million new jobs since August of 2003, more jobs than Japan and the 25 nations of the European Union combined. The unemployment rate is 4.8 percent. The productivity of America's workers is rising, and our economy grew at a strong annual rate of 4 percent during the first half of 2006.

To keep this momentum going, we're pursuing a strategy to sustain our economic growth and keep our economy competitive for decades to come. We will keep taxes low, restrain Federal spending, open new markets for American products, invest in new energy technologies, and help American workers develop the skills they need to compete for high-wage jobs.

American workers also need affordable, high-quality health care, and more transparency in our health care system can help. Next week, I will travel to Minnesota to discuss ways to ensure patients have access to more information about their health care. When patients know the facts about the price and quality of their health care options, they can make decisions that are right for them.

With all these steps, we're working to improve the health, security, and prosperity of the American people. Our Nation does not fear the future because we are determined to shape the future. We will build a more peaceful world and leave behind a stronger and better America for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:50 a.m. on August 18 at Camp David, MD, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 19. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 18 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

The President's News Conference
August 21, 2006

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Fancy digs you got here. Thanks for your hospitality. It's good to visit with you. I look forward to taking some of your questions. I do want to talk to you about the latest developments in Lebanon and what we're doing to ensure U.N. Security Council 1701 is implemented and its words are quickly put into action.

Resolution 1701 authorizes an effective international force to deploy to Lebanon, which is essential to peace in the region, and it's essential to the freedom of Lebanon. An effective international force will help ensure the cessation of hostilities holds in southern Lebanon once the Israeli troops withdraw. An effective international force will help the Lebanese Army meet its responsibility to secure Lebanon's borders and stop them from acting as—and stop Hizballah from acting as a state within a state. An effective international force will help give displaced people in both Lebanon and Israel the confidence to return to their homes and begin rebuilding their lives without fear of renewed violence and terror.

An international force requires international commitment. Previous resolutions have failed in Lebanon because they were not implemented by the international community, and in this case, did not prevent Hizballah and their sponsors from instigating violence. The new resolution authorizes a force of up to 15,000 troops. It gives this force an expanded mandate. The need is urgent. The international community must now designate the leadership of this new international force, give it robust rules of engagement, and deploy it as quickly as possible to secure the peace.

America will do our part. We will assist the new international force with logistic support, command and control, communications, and intelligence. Lebanon, Israel, and our allies agreed that this would be the most effective contribution we can make at this time. We will also work with the leadership in the international force, once it's identified, to ensure that the United States is doing all we can to make this mission a success.

Deployment of this new international force will also help speed delivery of humanitarian assistance. Our Nation is wasting no time in helping the people of Lebanon. In other words, we're acting before the force gets in there. We've been on the ground in Beirut for weeks, and I've already distributed more than half of our $50 million pledge of disaster relief to the Lebanese people who have lost their homes in the current conflict. Secretary Rice has led the diplomatic efforts to establish humanitarian corridors so that relief convoys can get through, to reopen the Beirut airport to passenger and humanitarian aid flights, and to ensure a steady fuel supply

for Lebanese powerplants and automobiles. I directed 25,000 tons of wheat be delivered in Lebanon in the coming weeks.

But we'll do even more. Today I'm announcing that America will send more aid to support humanitarian and reconstruction work in Lebanon, for a total of more than $230 million. These funds will help the Lebanese people rebuild their homes and return to their towns and communities. The funds will help the Lebanese people restore key bridges and roads. The funds will help the Lebanese people rehabilitate schools so the children can start their school year on time this fall.

I've directed that an oil spill response team be sent to assist the Lebanese Government in cleaning up an oil slick that is endangering coastal communities; proposing a $42 million package to help train and equip Lebanon's armed forces. I will soon be sending a Presidential delegation of private-sector leaders to Lebanon to identify ways that we can tap into the generosity of American businesses and non-profits to continue to help the people of Lebanon.

We take these steps—and I'll also work closely with Congress to extend the availability of loan guarantees to help rebuild infrastructure in Israel, infrastructure damaged by Hizballah's rockets.

America is making a long-term commitment to help the people of Lebanon because we believe every person deserves to live in a free, open society that respects the rights of all. We reject the killing of innocents to achieve a radical and violent agenda.

The terrorists and their state sponsors, Iran and Syria, have a much darker vision. They're working to thwart the efforts of the Lebanese people to break free from foreign domination and build their own democratic future. The terrorists and their sponsors are not going to succeed. The Lebanese people have made it clear: They want to live in freedom. And now it's up to their friends and allies to help them do so.

I'll be glad to answer some questions, starting with you, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Progress in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. More than 3,500 Iraqis were killed last month, the highest civilian monthly toll since the war began. Are you disappointed with the lack of progress by Iraq's unity Government in bringing together the sectarian and ethnic groups?

The President. No. I am aware that extremists and terrorists are doing everything they can to prevent Iraq's democracy from growing stronger. That's what I'm aware of. And therefore, we have a plan to help them—"them," the Iraqis—achieve their objectives. Part of the plan is political, and that is to help the Maliki Government work on reconciliation and to work on rehabilitating the community. The other part is, of course, security. And I have given our commanders all the flexibility they need to adjust tactics to be able to help the Iraqi Government defeat those who want to thwart the ambitions of the people. And that includes a very robust security plan for Baghdad.

We've, as you may or may not know, Terry, moved troops from Mosul, Stryker Brigade, into Baghdad, all aiming to help the Iraqi Government succeed.

You know, I hear a lot of talk about civil war. I'm concerned about that, of course, and I've talked to a lot of people about it. And what I've found from my talks are that the Iraqis want a unified country, and that the Iraqi leadership is determined to thwart the efforts of the extremists and the radicals and Al Qaida, and that the security forces remain united behind the Government. And one thing is clear: The Iraqi people are showing incredible courage.

The United States of America must understand, it's in our interests that we help this democracy succeed. As a matter of fact, it's in our interests that we help reformers across the Middle East achieve their objectives. This is the fundamental challenge of the 21st century. A failed Iraq would make America less secure. A failed Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will provide safe haven for terrorists and extremists. It will embolden those who are trying to thwart the ambitions of reformers. In this case, it would give the terrorists and extremists an additional tool besides

safe haven, and that is revenues from oil sales.

You know, it's an interesting debate we're having in America, about how we ought to handle Iraq. There's a lot of people—good, decent people saying, "Withdraw now." They're absolutely wrong. It would be a huge mistake for this country. If you think problems are tough now, imagine what it would be like if the United States leaves before this Government has a chance to defend herself, govern herself, and listen to the—and answer to the will of the people.

Patsy [Patricia Wilson, Reuters]. We're working our way here everybody.

Iran/Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Iran has indicated that it will defy the U.N. on nuclear enrichment. It's been holding military exercises, sending weapons and money to Hizballah. Isn't Tehran's influence in the region growing despite your efforts to curb it?

The President. The final history in the region has yet to be written. And what's very interesting about the violence in Lebanon and the violence in Iraq and the violence in Gaza is this: These are all groups of terrorists who are trying to stop the advance of democracy. They're trying to thwart the will of millions who simply want a normal, hopeful life. That's what we're seeing. And it's up to the international community to understand the threat.

I remember, right after Hizballah launched its rocket attacks on Israel, I said, this is a clarifying moment. It's a chance for the world to see the threats of the 21st century, the challenge we face.

And so to answer your question on Iran, Iran is obviously part of the problem. They sponsor Hizballah. They encourage a radical brand of Islam. Imagine how difficult this issue would be if Iran had a nuclear weapon. And so therefore, it's up to the international community, including the United States, to work in concert to—for effective diplomacy. And that begins at the United Nations Security Council.

We have passed one Security Council resolution, demanding that Iran cease its enrichment activities. We will see what their response is. We're beginning to get some indication, but we'll—let's wait until they have a formal response. The U.N. resolution calls for us to come back together on the 31st of August. The dates—dates are fine, but what really matters is will. And one of the things I will continue to remind our friends and allies is the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran.

But, no, you're right; this is a—they're a central part of creating instability, trying to stop reformers from realizing dreams. And the question facing this country is, will—do we, one, understand the threat to America? In other words, do we understand that a failed—failed states in the Middle East are a direct threat to our country's security? And secondly, will we continue to stay engaged in helping reformers, in working to advance liberty, to defeat an ideology that doesn't believe in freedom? And my answer is, so long as I'm the President, we will. I clearly see the challenge. I see the challenge to what these threats pose to our homeland, and I see the challenge—what these threats pose to the world.

Helen [Helen Thomas, Hearst Newspapers]. [*Laughter*] What's so funny about me saying "Helen"? [*Laughter*] It's the anticipation of your question, I guess.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Israel broke its word twice on a truce. And you mentioned Hizballah rockets, but it's—Israeli bombs have destroyed Lebanon. Why do you always give them a pass? And what's your view on breaking of your oath for a truce?

The President. Yes, thank you. I like to remind people about how this started, how this whole—how the damage to innocent life, which bothers me—but again, what caused this?

Q. Why drop bombs on——

The President. Let me finish—let—ma'am, let me—ma'am, please let me finish the question. It's a great question, to begin with. The followup was a little difficult, but anyway. [*Laughter*] I know you're waiting for my answer, aren't you, with bated breath. There you go.

This never would have occurred had a terrorist organization, a state within a state, not launched attacks on a sovereign nation. From the beginning, Helen, I said that Israel, one,

has a right to defend herself, but Israel ought to be cautious about how she defends herself. Israel is a democratically elected government. They make decisions on their own sovereignty. It's their decisionmaking that is—what leads to the tactics they chose.

But the world must understand that now is the time to come together to address the root cause of the problem. And the problem was, you have a state within a state. You had people launch attacks on a sovereign nation without the consent of the Government in the country in which they are lodged.

And that's why it's very important for all of us, those of us who are involved in this process, to get an international force into Lebanon to help the Lebanese Government achieve some objectives. One is their ability to exert control over the entire country; secondly is to make sure that the Hizballah forces don't rearm, don't get arms from Syria or Iran through Syria, to be able to continue to wreak havoc in the region.

Let's see—we'll finish the first line here. Everybody can be patient.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Yes. [*Laughter*] It's kind of like dancing together, isn't it? [*Laughter*]

Q. Yes, kind of. [*Laughter*]

Q. Very close quarters.

The President. If I ask for any comments from the peanut gallery, I'll call on you, Herman [Ken Herman, Cox]. [*Laughter*] By the way, seersucker is coming back. I hope everybody gets—[*laughter*]—never mind.

Q. It's the summertime east Texas county commissioner look. [*Laughter*]

The President. Yes. Yes, Martha [Martha Raddatz, ABC News]. Sorry.

Iraq

Q. That's quite all right. Mr. President, I'd like to go back to Iraq. You've continually cited the elections, the new Government, its progress in Iraq, and yet the violence has gotten worse in certain areas. You've had to go to Baghdad again. Is it not time for a new strategy? And if not, why not?

The President. You know, Martha; you've covered the Pentagon; you know that the Pentagon is constantly adjusting tactics because they have the flexibility from the White House to do so.

Q. I'm talking about strategy——

The President. The strategy is to help the Iraqi people achieve their objectives and their dreams, which is a democratic society. That's the strategy. The tactics—now, either you say, yes, it's important we stay there and get it done, or we leave. We're not leaving, so long as I'm the President. That would be a huge mistake. It would send an unbelievably terrible signal to reformers across the region. It would say we've abandoned our desire to change the conditions that create terror. It would give the terrorists a safe haven from which to launch attacks. It would embolden Iran. It would embolden extremists.

No, we're not leaving. The strategic objective is to help this Government succeed. That's the strategic—and not only to help the Government—the reformers in Iraq succeed but to help the reformers across the region succeed, to fight off the elements of extremism. The tactics are—which change. Now, if you say, are you going to change your strategic objective, it means you're leaving before the mission is complete. And we're not going to leave before the mission is complete. I agree with General Abizaid: We leave before the mission is done, the terrorists will follow us here.

And so we have changed tactics. Our commanders have got the flexibility necessary to change tactics on the ground, starting with Plan Baghdad. And that's when we moved troops from Mosul into Baghdad and replaced them with the Stryker Brigade. So in essence, we increased troops during this time of instability.

Suzanne [Suzanne Malveaux, Cable News Network].

Q. Sir, that's not really the question. The strategy——

The President. Sounded like the question to me.

Q. You keep saying that you don't want to leave. But is your strategy to win working? Even if you don't want to leave—you've gone into Baghdad before; these things have happened before.

The President. If I didn't think it would work, I would change the—our commanders would recommend changing the strategy. They believe it will work. It takes time to defeat these people. The Maliki Government

has been in power for less than 6 months. And, yes, the people spoke. I've cited that as a part of—the reason I cite it is because it's what the Iraqi people want. And the fundamental question facing this Government is whether or not we will stand with reformers across the region. It's really the task. And we're going to stand with this Government.

Obviously, I wish the violence would go down, but not as much as the Iraqi citizens would wish the violence would go down. But, incredibly enough, they showed great courage, and they want our help. And any sign that says we're going to leave before the job is done simply emboldens terrorists and creates a certain amount of doubt for people so they won't take the risk necessary to help a civil society evolve in the country.

This is a campaign—I'm sure they're watching the campaign carefully. There are a lot of good, decent people saying, "Get out now; vote for me; I will do everything I can to"—I guess, cut off money is how—is what they'll try to do to get our troops out. It's a big mistake. It would be wrong, in my judgment, for us to leave before the mission is complete in Iraq.

Suzanne.

Situation in the Middle East/United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Back to Lebanon. The Lebanese Prime Minister, over the weekend, said that Israel flagrantly violated the cease-fire with its raid into Lebanon. And so far, the European allies who've committed forces, the U.N. security peacekeeping forces, have expressed reservations; those Muslim nations who've offered troops have been shunned by Israeli officials. Why shouldn't we see the cease-fire as one that essentially is falling apart? And what makes this more than a piece of paper if you don't have the will of the international community to back it up?

The President. Yes. No, listen—all the more reason why we need to help our friends and allies get the forces necessary to help the Lebanese forces keep the cessation of hostilities in place, intact. And that's why we're working with friends, with allies, with Security Council members, to make sure the force that is committed is robust and the rules of engagement are clear. And so it's an ongoing series of conversations and discussions, and hopefully, this will happen quite quickly.

Q. Will you pressure the French to contribute more troops?

The President. Well, we're pressing on all. I was asked about the French the other day at Camp David, and I—listen, France has had a very close relationship with Lebanon; there's historical ties with Lebanon. I would hope they would put more troops in. I mean, they understand the region as well as anybody. And so we're working with a lot of folks, trying to get this force up and running.

Look, like you—I mean, you sound somewhat frustrated by diplomacy. Diplomacy can be a frustrating thing. I think the strategy can work, so long as the force is robust and the rules of engagement are clear.

Iran/United Nations Security Council Resolution 1696

Q. Mr. President, as you mentioned, we're just 10 days from the U.N. Security Council deadline on Iran. Judging by the public comments from the Iranians, it appears, at least, highly unlikely that they're going to stop or suspend their enrichment program. Are you confident that the U.N. Security Council will move quickly on sanctions if Iran thumbs its nose at the world again?

The President. I certainly hope so. In order for the U.N. to be effective, there must be consequences if people thumb their nose at the United Nations Security Council. And we will work with people in the Security Council to achieve that objective, and the objective is that there's got to be a consequence for them basically ignoring what the Security Council has suggested through resolution.

Q. Understanding that diplomacy takes time, do you think that this could drag out for a while?

The President. You know, I don't know. I certainly want to solve this problem diplomatically, and I believe the best chance to do so is for there to be more than one voice speaking clearly to the Iranians. And I was pleased that we got a resolution, that there

was a group of nations willing to come together to send a message to the Iranians—nations as diverse as China and Russia, plus the EU–3 and the United States.

Kelly [Kelly O'Donnell, NBC News].

Iraq/War on Terror

Q. Morning, Mr. President. When you talked today about the violence in Baghdad, first you mentioned extremists, radicals, and then Al Qaida. It seems that Al Qaida and foreign fighters are much less of a problem there, and that it really is Iraqi versus Iraqi. And when we heard about your meeting the other day with experts and so forth, some of the reporting out of that said you were frustrated; you were surprised. And your spokesman said, no, you're determined. But frustration seems like a very real emotion. Why wouldn't you be frustrated, sir, about what's happening?

The President. I'm not—I do remember the meeting; I don't remember being surprised. I'm not sure what they meant by that.

Q. About the lack of gratitude among the Iraqi people.

The President. Oh. No, I think—first of all, to the first part of your question, if you look back at the words of Zarqawi before he was brought to justice, he made it clear that the intent of their tactics in Iraq was to create civil strife. In other words, if you—look at what he said. He said, "Let's kill Shi'a to get Shi'a to seek revenge," and therefore, to create this kind of—hopefully, cycle of violence.

Secondly, it's pretty clear that—at least the evidence indicates that the bombing of the shrine was—it was an Al Qaida plot, all intending to create sectarian violence. No, Al Qaida is still very active in Iraq. As a matter of fact, some of the more—I would guess, I would surmise that some of the more spectacular bombings are done by Al Qaida suiciders.

No question there's sectarian violence as well. And the challenge is to provide a security plan such that a political process can go forward. And I know—I'm sure you all are tired of hearing me say 12 million Iraqis voted, but it's an indication about the desire for people to live in a free society. That's what that means, see.

And the only way to defeat this ideology in the long term is to defeat it through another ideology, a competing ideology, one that—where Government responds to the will of the people. And that's really—really the fundamental question we face here in the beginning of this 21st century is whether or not we believe as a nation, and others believe, it is possible to defeat this ideology.

Now, I recognize, some say that these folks are not ideologically bound. I strongly disagree. I think not only do they have an ideology; they have tactics necessary to spread their ideology. And it would be a huge mistake for the United States to leave the region, to concede territory to the terrorists, to not confront them. And the best way to confront them is to help those who want to live in free society.

Look, eventually Iraq will succeed because the Iraqis will see to it that they succeed. And our job is to help them succeed. That's our job. Our job is to help their forces be better equipped, to help their police be able to deal with these extremists, and to help their Government succeed.

Q. But are you frustrated, sir?

The President. Frustrated? Sometimes I'm frustrated—rarely surprised. Sometimes I'm happy. This is—but war is not a time of joy. These aren't joyous times. These are challenging times, and they're difficult times, and they're straining the psyche of our country. I understand that. You know, nobody likes to see innocent people die. Nobody wants to turn on their TV on a daily basis and see havoc wrought by terrorists. And our question is, do we have the capacity and the desire to spread peace by confronting these terrorists and supporting those who want to live in liberty? That's the question. And my answer to that question is, we must. We owe it to future generations to do so.

Bill [Bill Plante, CBS News].

Situation in the Middle East/United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559

Q. Mr. President, as you have reminded us a number of times, it was Hizballah that started the confrontation between Israel and Lebanon. But you were supportive of the holding off of any kind of cease-fire until

Israel had a chance to clear out the Hizballah weapons. By all accounts, they did not exactly succeed in doing that. And by all accounts, the Lebanese Army, as it moved into southern Lebanon, had a wink-and-a-nod arrangement with Hizballah not to disturb anything, to just leave things as they are, a situation not unknown in the Middle East. Do you demand that the peacekeeping force, if and when it gets up and running, disarm Hizballah?

The President. The truth of the matter is, if 1559, that's the United Nations Security Council resolution number, had been fully implemented, we wouldn't be in the situation we were in to begin with. There is—there will be another resolution coming out of the United Nations giving further instructions to the international force. First things first—is to get the rules of engagement clear so that the force will be robust, to help the Lebanese.

One thing is for certain—is that when this force goes in to help Lebanon, Hizballah won't have that safe haven or that kind of freedom to run on the—in Lebanon's southern border. In other words, there's an opportunity to create a cushion, a security cushion. Hopefully, over time, Hizballah will disarm. You can't have a democracy with a armed political party willing to bomb its neighbor without the consent of its Government, or just deciding, well, "Let's just create enough chaos and discord by lobbing rockets."

And so the reality is, in order for Lebanon to succeed—and we want Lebanon's democracy to succeed—the process is going to—the Lebanese Government is eventually going to have to deal with Hizballah.

Q. But it's the status quo if there's no disarming.

The President. Not really. I mean, yes, eventually, you're right. But in the meantime, there will be a—there's a security zone, something to—where the Lebanese Army and the UNIFIL force are more robust, UNIFIL force can create a security zone between Lebanon and Israel. That would be helpful.

But, ultimately, you're right. Your question is, shouldn't Hizballah disarm, and ultimately, they should. And it's necessary for the Lebanese Government to succeed.

The cornerstone of our policy in that part of the world is to help democracies. Lebanon is a democracy; we want the Siniora Government to succeed. Part of our aid package is going to be, help strengthen the Army of Lebanon so when the Government speaks, when the Government commits its troops, they do so in an effective way.

Knoller [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Presidential Pardons

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. How are you feeling?

Q. I'm good, sir. It's good to be back.

The President. Good to see you. Yes, it's good to see you. Sorry we didn't spend more time in Crawford. I knew you were anxious to do so.

Q. Always am.

The President. That's good. [*Laughter*] That's why we love seeing you.

Q. Thanks. Let me ask you about Presidential pardons. Last week, you issued 17 of them. That brought the number of pardons you've issued in your Presidency to 97, and that's far fewer than most of your recent predecessors, except your dad. And I want to ask you, do you consider yourself to be stingy when it comes to pardons? What is your philosophy on granting Presidential pardons?

The President. You know, I don't have the criterion in front of me, Mark, but we have a strict criterion that we utilize—"we" being the Justice Department and the White House Counsel. And I, frankly, haven't compared the number of pardons I've given, to any other President. Perhaps I should. But I don't think a scorecard should, necessarily, be the guidepost for pardoning people.

McKinnon [John McKinnon, Wall Street Journal]. I'm going to go to you, Jackson [David Jackson, USA Today], and kind of work around.

Energy/Alternative Fuel Sources

Q. Thanks. Mr. President, what do you say to people who are losing patience with gas prices at $3 a gallon? And how much of a political price do you think you're paying for that right now?

The President. I've been talking about gas prices ever since they got high, starting with

this—look, I understand gas prices are like a hidden tax—not a hidden tax, it's a tax—it's taking money out of people's pockets. I know that. All the more reason for us to diversify away from crude oil. That's not going to happen overnight. We passed law that encouraged consumption through different purchasing habits, like hybrid vehicles—you buy a hybrid; you get a tax credit. We've encouraged the spread of ethanol as an alternative to crude oil. We have asked for Congress to pass regulatory relief so we can build more refineries to increase the supply of gasoline, hopefully taking the pressure off of price.

And so the strategy is to recognize that dependency upon crude oil is—in a global market affects us economically here at home, and therefore, we need to diversify away as quickly as possible.

Jackson.

Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. As you know, the one-year anniversary of Katrina is coming up. And there are a lot of retrospectives about what went wrong down there last year. Specifically, what has your administration done in the past year to help the folks down there, and what remains to be done?

The President. Yes, thanks. You know, I went to New Orleans, in Jackson Square, and made a commitment that we would help the people there recover. I also want the people down there to understand that it's going to take awhile to recover. This was a huge storm.

First things—the first thing that's necessary to help the recovery is money. And our Government has committed over $110 billion to help. Of that, a lot of money went to—went out the door to help people adjust from having to be moved because of the storm. And then there's rental assistance, infrastructure repair, debris removal. Mississippi removed about 97 percent, 98 percent of its—what they call dry debris. We're now in the process of getting debris from the waters removed. Louisiana is slower in terms of getting debris removed. The money is available to help remove that debris. People can get after it, and I would hope they would.

Q. What——

The President. Let me finish. Thank you.

We provided about $1.8 billion for education. That money has gone out the door. We want those schools up and running. As I understand, the schools are running now in New Orleans; a lot of schools are. Flood insurance—we're spending money on flood insurance. There is more work to be done, particularly when it comes to housing. We've spent about—or appropriated about 16 billion, $17 billion for direct housing grants to people in the gulf coast and in Louisiana.

I made the decision, along with the local authorities, that each State ought to develop a housing recovery plan. That's what they call the LRA in Louisiana. They're responsible for taking the Federal money and getting it to the people. Same in—Mississippi has developed its own plan.

I thought it would be best that there be a local plan developed and implemented by local folks. And so there's now, as I mentioned, $16 billion of direct housing grants. Each State has developed its own plan, how much money goes to each homeowner to help these people rebuild their lives. And so I think the area where people will see the most effect in their lives is when they start getting this individualized CDBG grant money.

Q. Is there anything that's disappointed you about the recovery, the Federal response?

The President. I was concerned at first about how much Congress and the taxpayers would be willing to appropriate and spend. I think $110 billion is a strong commitment, and I'm pleased with that. Any time we—I named a man named Don Powell to go down there, and the thing that's most important is for the Government to eliminate any bureaucratic obstacles when we find something that's not moving quick enough.

I think, for example, about debris removal. There was the issue of whether or not the Government would pay for debris removal on private property, or not. So we worked out a plan with the local mayors and local county commissioners, local parish presidents to be able to designate certain property

as a health hazard. And when they did so, then Government money could pay for it. In other words, we're trying to be flexible with the rules and regulations we have to deal with.

But the place where people, I'm sure, are going to be most frustrated is whether or not they're going to get the money to rebuild their homes. And my attitude is, we've appropriated the money, and now we'll work with the States to get the money.

April [April Ryan, American Urban Radio Networks], I suspect you have a followup on this.

State and Local Government Role in Hurricane Recovery

Q. Yes, I do, sir.

The President. Why don't you let her go?

Q. And another question, sir. The followup: Some have a concern that you've given all of this money, but the Federal Government has moved away to let the local government, particularly in New Orleans, handle everything, and things are not moving like they expected. And that's one of the concerns. And another question, if you——

The President. Well, let me address that, and I promise you can ask that other one.

As I mentioned to you, the strategy from the get-go was to work with the local folks in Mississippi and Louisiana, and they would then submit their plans to the Federal Government, particularly for housing. And that upon approval, we would then disburse the appropriated monies—in this case, about $17 billion for housing grants. And so each State came up with a grant formula, and I can't give you all the details. But it's—the whole purpose is intended to get money into people's pockets to help them rebuild. And once the strategy is developed at the State and local level, it makes sense for the monies to be appropriated at the State and local level. And if there's a level of frustration there, we will work with the LRA in this case.

Second question.

Q. Well, I have one followup on that. Do you think——

The President. Well, how many—are you trying to dominate this thing? [*Laughter*]

Q. No, sir, but I don't get a chance to talk to you as much as the others.

The President. That's not—wait a minute. [*Laughter*]

Q. But a followup real quick. Do you think that more needs to be done? Does the Federal Government need to put its hands on what's going on? Because New Orleans is not moving——

The President. I think the best way to do this is for the Federal Government's representative, Don Powell, to continue to work with Mayor Nagin and Governor Blanco to get the money into the hands of the people. The money has been appropriated; the formula is in place; and now it's time to move forward.

Now, you have another question, I presume.

North Korea

Q. Yes, sir. And this is it, sir. Chinese officials are saying that you need to get involved in the six-party talks, and that ultimately, you have to be a part of the six-party talks in dealing with North Korea. And also, they're saying that you need to stop dealing with the issue of money laundering and deal with the real issue of ballistic missiles. What are your thoughts?

The President. Well, counterfeiting U.S. dollars is an issue that every President ought to be concerned about. And when you catch people counterfeiting your money, you need to do something about it.

We are very much involved in the six-party talks. As a matter of fact, I talked to Hu Jintao this morning about the six-party talks and about the need for us to continue to work together to send a clear message to the North Korean leader that there is a better choice for him than to continue to develop a nuclear weapon. The six-party talks are—is an important part of our—the six-party talks are an important part of our strategy of dealing with Kim Jong Il. And the North Korean—the Chinese President recognized that in the phone call today. And so we talked about how we'll continue to collaborate and work together.

Jim [Jim Rutenberg, New York Times].

War on Terror/Public Debate

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned the campaign earlier. Do you agree

with those in your party, including the Vice President, who have said or implied that Democratic voters emboldened Al Qaida types by choosing Ned Lamont over Joe Lieberman, and then as a message that—how Americans vote will send messages to terrorists abroad? Thank you.

The President. You're welcome. What all of us in this administration have been saying is that leaving Iraq before the mission is complete will send the wrong message to the enemy and will create a more dangerous world. That's what we're saying. It's an honest debate, and it's an important debate for Americans to listen to and to be engaged in. In our judgment, the consequences for defeat in Iraq are unacceptable.

And I fully understand that some didn't think we ought to go in there in the first place. But defeat—if you think it's bad now, imagine what Iraq would look like if the United States leaves before this Government can defend itself and sustain itself. Chaos in Iraq would be very unsettling in the region. Leaving before the job would be done would send a message that America really is no longer engaged, nor cares about the form of governments in the Middle East. Leaving before the job was done would send a signal to our troops that the sacrifices they made were not worth it. Leaving before the job is done would be a disaster, and that's what we're saying.

I will never question the patriotism of somebody who disagrees with me. This has nothing to do with patriotism; it has everything to do with understanding the world in which we live. It's like the other day; I was critical of those who heralded the Federal judge's opinion about the terrorist surveillance program. I thought it was a terrible opinion, and that's why we're appealing it. And I have no—look, I understand how democracy works—quite a little bit of criticism in it, which is fine; that's fine; it's part of the process. But I have every right, as do my administration, to make it clear what the consequences would be of policy. And if we think somebody is wrong or doesn't see the world the way it is, we'll continue to point that out to people.

And therefore, those who heralded the decision not to give law enforcement the tools necessary to protect the American people simply don't see the world the way we do. They see, maybe these are kind of isolated incidents. These aren't isolated incidents; they're tied together. There is a global war going on. And somebody said, "Well, this is law enforcement." No, this isn't law enforcement, in my judgment. Law enforcement means kind of a simple, singular response to the problem. This is a global war on terror. We're facing extremists that believe something, and they want to achieve objectives. And therefore, the United States must use all our assets, and we must work with others to defeat this enemy. That's the call. And we—in the short run, we've got to stop them from attacking us. That's why I give the Tony Blair Government great credit, and their intelligence officers, and our own Government credit for working with the Brits to stop this attack.

But you know something—it's an amazing town, isn't it, where they say, on the one hand, "You can't have the tools necessary—we herald the fact that you won't have the tools necessary to defend the people," and sure enough, an attack would occur, and say, "How come you don't have the tools necessary to defend the people?" That's the way we think around this town.

And so, yes, we'll continue—Jim, we'll continue to speak out in a respectful way, never challenging somebody's love for America when you criticize their strategies or their point of view. And, you know, for those who say that, well, all they're trying to say is, we're not patriotic, simply don't listen to our words very carefully, do they?

What matters is that in this campaign that we clarify the different point of view. And there are a lot of people in the Democrat Party who believe that the best course of action is to leave Iraq before the job is done, period. And they're wrong. And the American people have got to understand the consequence of leaving Iraq before the job is done. We're not going to leave Iraq before the job is done, and we'll complete the mission in Iraq. I can't tell you exactly when it's going to be done, but I do know that it's important for us to support the Iraqi people, who have shown incredible courage in their desire to live in a free society. And if we

ever give up the desire to help people who live in freedom, we will have lost our soul as a nation, as far as I'm concerned.

Ann [Ann Compton, ABC Radio].

Mid-Term Elections/Iraq

Q. Is that a make-or-break issue for you in terms of domestic politics? There's a Republican in Pennsylvania who says he doesn't think the troops should—would you campaign for Mike Fitzpatrick?

The President. I already have.

Q. And would you campaign against Senator Joe Lieberman, whose Republican candidate may support you, but he supports you too, on Iraq?

The President. I'm going to stay out of Connecticut. [*Laughter*]

Q. It's your native State, Mr. President. You were born there.

The President. Shhh. [*Laughter*] I may be the only person—the only Presidential candidate who never carried the State in which he was born. Do you think that's right, Herman? Of course, you would have researched that and dropped it out for everybody to see—particularly since I dissed that just ridiculous looking outfit. [*Laughter*]

Q. Your mother raised you better than that, Mr. President.

The President. That is—so I'm not going to say it——

Q. There is Al Gore.

The President. I don't want anybody to know that I think it's ridiculous. Look, I'm not through yet.

Q. ——make-or-break issue for you?

The President. And by the way, I'm staying out of Connecticut because that's what the party suggested, the Republican Party of Connecticut. And plus, there's a better place to spend our money, time, and resources——

Q. But you're the head of the party.

The President. Right. I've listened to them very carefully. I'm a thoughtful guy. I listen to people. [*Laughter*] I'm openminded. I'm all the things that you know I am.

The other part of your question? Look, issues are won based upon whether or not you can keep this economy strong—elections are won based upon economic issues and national security issues. And there's a fundamental difference between many of the Democrats and my party, and that is, they want to leave before the job is completed in Iraq. And again, I repeat, these are decent people. They're just as American as I am. I just happen to strongly disagree with them. And it's very important for the American people to understand the consequences of leaving Iraq before the job is done.

This is a global war on terror. I repeat what our major general said—or leading general said, in the region. He said, "If we withdraw before the job is done, the enemy will follow us here." I strongly agree with that. And if you believe that the job of the Federal Government is to secure this country, it's really important for you to understand that success in Iraq is part of securing the country.

We're talking about a long-term issue here as well, Ann. In the short term, we've got to have the tools necessary to stop terrorist attack. That means good intel, good intelligence sharing, the capacity to know whether Al Qaida is calling into this country and why. We've got to have all those tools—the PATRIOT Act, the tearing down those walls between intel and law enforcement are a necessary part of protecting the country. But in the long term, the only way to defeat this terrorist bunch is through the spread of liberty and freedom.

And that's a big challenge. I understand it's a challenge. It requires commitment and patience and persistence. I believe it's the challenge of this—the challenge for this generation. I believe we owe it to our children and grandchildren to stay engaged and to help spread liberty and to help reformers.

Now, ultimately, success is going to be up to the reformers. Just like in Iraq, it's going to require Iraqis—the will of Iraqis to succeed. I understand that. And that's why our strategy is to give them the tools necessary to defend themselves and help them defend themselves, in this case, right now, mainly in Baghdad, but, as well, around the country.

At home, if I were a candidate, if I were running, I'd say, look at what the economy has done. It's strong. We created a lot of jobs—let me finish my question, please. These hands going up—I'm not—I'm kind of getting old and just getting into my peroration. [*Laughter*] Look it up. [*Laughter*] I'd be telling people that the Democrats will

raise your taxes. That's what they said. I'd be reminding people that tax cuts have worked in terms of stimulating the economy. I'd be reminding people, there's a philosophical difference between those who want to raise taxes and have the Government spend the money, and those of us who say, you get to spend the money the way you want to—see fit; it's your money. I'd remind people that progrowth economic policies have helped us cut that deficit faster than we thought.

I'd also remind people, if I were running, that the long-term problem facing the budget is Social Security and Medicare. And they look—Republican or Democrat ought to say, "I look forward to working with the President to solve the problem. People expect us to come here to solve problems, and thus far, the attitude has been, let's just kind of ignore what the President has said and just hope somebody else comes and solves it for us."

And that's what I'd be running on. I'd be running on the economy, and I'd be running on national security. But since I'm not running, I can only serve as an adviser to those who are.

Yes, Herman.

Public Opinion Polls/Iraq

Q. Thank you, sir. Go ahead. [*Laughter*]

The President. I don't need to, now that you've stood up and everybody can clearly see for themselves. [*Laughter*]

Q. Mr. President, polls continue to show sagging support for the war in Iraq. I'm curious as to how you see this developing. Is it your belief that long-term results will vindicate your strategy and people will change their mind about it, or is this the kind of thing you're doing because you think it's right and you don't care if you ever gain public support for it? Thank you.

The President. Thank you. Look, I mean, Presidents care about whether people support their policies. I don't mean to say, I don't care; of course I care. But I understand why people are discouraged about Iraq—I can understand that. There is—we live in a world in which people, I guess, hope things happen quickly, and this is a situation where things don't happen quickly because there's a very tough group of people using tactics, mainly the killing of innocent people, to achieve their objective. And they're skillful about how they do this, and they also know the impact of what it means on the consciousness of those of us who live in the free world. They know that.

And so, yes, I care; I really do. I wish—and so therefore, I'm going to spend a lot of time trying to explain as best as I can why it's important for us to succeed in Iraq.

Q. Can I follow——

The President. Let me finish. On the other hand, Ken, I don't think you've ever heard me say—and you've now been covering me for quite awhile, 12 years—I don't think I've—12 years? Yes. Exactly. Yes. I don't think you've ever heard me say, "Gosh, I'd better change positions because the polls say this or that." I've been here long enough to understand, you cannot make good decisions if you're trying to chase a poll. And so the second part of your question is, look, I'm going to do what I think is right, and if people don't like me for it, that's just the way it is.

War on Terror/Spread of Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Quick followup. A lot of the consequences you mentioned for pulling out seem like maybe they never would have been there if we hadn't gone in. How do you square all of that?

The President. I square it because, imagine a world in which you had Saddam Hussein who had the capacity to make a weapon of mass destruction, who was paying suiciders to kill innocent life, who would—who had relations with Zarqawi. Imagine what the world would be like with him in power. The idea is to try to help change the Middle East.

Now, look, part of the reason we went into Iraq was—the main reason we went into Iraq at the time was we thought he had weapons of mass destruction. It turns out he didn't, but he had the capacity to make weapons of mass destruction. But I also talked about the human suffering in Iraq, and I also talked the need to advance a freedom agenda. And so my question—my answer to your question is, is that, imagine a world in which Saddam Hussein was there, stirring up even more trouble in a part of the world that had so

much resentment and so much hatred that people came and killed 3,000 of our citizens.

You know, I've heard this theory about everything was just fine until we arrived, and then—kind of the "stir up the hornet's nest" theory. It just doesn't hold water, as far as I'm concerned. The terrorists attacked us and killed 3,000 of our citizens before we started the freedom agenda in the Middle East.

Q. What did Iraq have to do with that?

The President. What did Iraq have to do with what?

Q. The attack on the World Trade Center?

The President. Nothing, except for it's part of—and nobody has ever suggested in this administration that Saddam Hussein ordered the attack. Iraq was a—the lesson of September the 11th is, take threats before they fully materialize, Ken. Nobody has ever suggested that the attacks of September the 11th were ordered by Iraq. I have suggested, however, that resentment and the lack of hope create the breeding grounds for terrorists who are willing to use suiciders to kill to achieve an objective. I have made that case.

And one way to defeat that—defeat resentment is with hope. And the best way to do hope is through a form of government. Now, I said going into Iraq, we've got to take these threats seriously before they fully materialize. I saw a threat. I fully believe it was the right decision to remove Saddam Hussein, and I fully believe the world is better off without him. Now the question is, how do we succeed in Iraq? And you don't succeed by leaving before the mission is complete, like some in this political process are suggesting.

Last question. Stretch [Bill Sammon, Washington Examiner]. Who are you working for, Stretch?

Food and Drug Administration

Q. Washington Examiner.

The President. Oh, good. I'm glad you found work. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you very much. Mr. President, some pro-life groups are worried that your choice of FDA Commissioner will approve over the counter sales of Plan B, a pill that, they say, essentially can cause early-term abortions. Do you stand by this choice, and how do you feel about Plan B in general?

The President. I believe that Plan B ought to be—ought to require a prescription for minors; that's what I believe. And I support Andy's decision.

James S. Brady Briefing Room Renovation

Thanks for letting me come by the new digs here.

Q. Do you like them?

The President. They may be a little too fancy for you.

Q. We'd be happy to go back.

Q. Are we coming back?

Q. Ever?

The President. Absolutely, you're coming back.

Q. Can we hold you to that?

The President. Coming back to the bosom of the White House. [*Laughter*] I'm looking forward to hugging you when you come back, everybody. When are you coming back?

Q. As soon as they can have us.

Q. You tell us.

Q. May.

The President. May, is that when it is scheduled?

Q. They've sealed off of our—they sealed off the door. We're wondering if we're really coming back or not.

Q. The decision will be made by commanders on the ground, sir. [*Laughter*]

Q. There's no timetable.

The President. What do you think this is, a correspondents dinner or something? [*Laughter*]

Thank you all.

Q. Thank you, sir.

Q. Want to come down and see our workspace?

The President. No. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:02 a.m. at the White House Conference Center Briefing Room. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA; Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; President Hu Jintao of China; Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea; U.S. District Court Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan Anna

Diggs Taylor; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. Reporters referred to senatorial candidates Ned Lamont and Alan Schlesinger of Connecticut; and former Vice President Al Gore.

Proclamation 8040—Women's Equality Day, 2006

August 21, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The ratification of our Constitution's 19th Amendment on August 26, 1920, marked a turning point for America as women were guaranteed the right to vote. On Women's Equality Day, we celebrate this milestone and pay tribute to the inspiring individuals who stepped forward and asked our Nation to live up to its founding principle of equality for all.

The struggle for women's rights is a story of strong women joining together to break down the barriers to equality. With courage and determination, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and other suffragists inspired generations of women and helped change the path of our Nation's history. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 sparked a mass movement for women's voting rights that gained support from women of all ages and backgrounds. In 1890, Wyoming became the first State whose constitution allowed women to vote, and by 1918, women could vote in 14 additional States. Two years later, women secured nationwide suffrage with the passage of the 19th Amendment. By demanding participation in the democratic process, these visionaries helped spread freedom, justice, and hope for generations to come.

Women today are continuing the suffragists' legacy of leadership and strength. They are shaping the future through their contributions to all aspects of American life, including science, law, business, education, athletics, and the arts. They are serving our Nation with honor and distinction in our Armed Forces. American women have served as examples for women in other countries in their efforts to increase their participation in civic and political life. Our Nation remains committed to advancing the equality of women in the world's newest democracies and fighting threats to women around the globe.

The courage of American suffragists made our Nation a stronger and more hopeful place, and we will continue to build an America where the dignity of every person is respected and where opportunity is within reach of all our citizens. On Women's Equality Day, we honor the contributions and accomplishments of women throughout our history, and we pay tribute to all those who helped bring equality to women in America.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim August 26, 2006, as Women's Equality Day. I call upon the people of the United States to celebrate the achievements of women and observe this day with appropriate programs and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-first.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:47 a.m., August 23, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on August 24.

Memorandum on Determination Pursuant to Section 2(c)(1) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as Amended

August 21, 2006

Presidential Determination No. 2006–21

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Determination Pursuant to Section 2(c)(1) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as Amended

Pursuant to Section 2(c)(1) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as

amended, 22 U.S.C. 2601(c)(1), I hereby determine that it is important to the national interest that up to $13.5 million be made available from the U.S. Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance Fund to meet unexpected urgent humanitarian needs related to the conflict in Lebanon. These funds may be used, as appropriate, to provide contributions to international, governmental, and nongovernmental organizations, and, as necessary, for administrative expenses of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

You are authorized and directed to inform the appropriate committees of the Congress of this determination and the obligation of funds under this authority, and to arrange for the publication of this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

Remarks in a Discussion on Health Care Transparency in Minneapolis, Minnesota

August 22, 2006

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. We've got some work to do. [*Laughter*]

Thanks for being here today. And I want to thank our panelists for joining Secretary Leavitt and me to talk about health care. And before we do, I want to say a couple of words about some of the guests here. First, I'm real proud to be here with your Governor, Tim Pawlenty. Governor, thanks for being here. Senator Norman Coleman is with us. Senator, thanks for coming. Three Members of the Congress: Jim Ramstad, whose district we're in; Mark Kennedy is with us; John Kline is with us. Thanks for coming.

We've got members of the statehouse here. We've got local officials—Mayor Jan Callison, the mayor of—Mayor, thanks for coming. This is the 50th anniversary of Minnetonka, right? Yes, good. Congratulations. Wait until you turn 60. [*Laughter*] It's not as old as it sounds. [*Laughter*]

We're going to have an interesting dialog today. I'm going the sign an Executive order after a while, but I want to explain why we're signing the Executive order to you. We've got an interesting debate in health care in America. And I guess if I had to summarize how I view it, I would say there's a choice between having the government make decisions or consumers make decisions. I stand on the side of encouraging consumers. I think the most important relationship in health care is between the patient and their provider, the patient and the doc. [*Applause*] Thank you. And health care policy ought to be aimed at bolstering the consumer. Empowering individuals to be responsible for health care decisions is kind of the crux about what we're talking about.

Obviously, all of us are concerned about costs. You know, I hear it a lot. We talk about—we'll hear from Jane Brown here, who helps those who need help here in your community. She says health care costs oftentimes make it hard for people to buy food. You talk to small-business owners and one of the big concerns they have is the cost of health care, that many, in order to stay in business, you know, have to say to their employee, "You provide for yourself." And that's troubling. It's troubling. It doesn't matter what your political party is; it's an issue that needs to be addressed

And so the fundamental question is, how do you address cost, given the philosophy that I've just described to you? And so here are some ideas I'd like to share with you.

One way to help small businesses address the cost of rising insurance is to allow them to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries. In other words, if you're a restaurant in Minnesota and you're a restaurant in Texas, you ought to be allowed to pool your employees into a employee risk pool so that the insurance is lower because of the spreading of risk. Those are called association health plans. One idea to—that says basically, the small-business owner will be in charge of the health care for his or her company—is to encourage association health plans.

Another idea is to make sure that—let me take a step back. There is a very important role for the Federal Government in health care. And that is to provide for the elderly and the poor. One of the things that Mike and I have worked on, and I hope some of you have helped with, is to encourage seniors

to take a look at the new Medicare drug benefit. I was very concerned that Medicare had gone stale, and it needed to be reformed. Medicare is a vital program, and it's an important Federal program. And it worked.

The problem is, medicine had changed and Medicare hadn't. Medicare would pay, you know, $100,000 for an operation but not a dime for the prescription drugs that would prevent the operation from being needed in the first place. And it didn't make any sense. It didn't make any sense to the seniors, nor did it make any sense to the taxpayers. So we've changed Medicare. And if you're a poor senior in America, the Government is going to really help you with prescription drugs. And if you're not a poor senior, you'll save a half on your drug—prescription drugs. It's a good deal.

The Federal Government has also got a role in helping the poor through Medicaid. And one of the tasks that I've given to Michael Leavitt is to say to the Governors, "You should have the flexibility necessary to design a Medicaid program that meets the needs of your citizens."

Now, having said that, here's what we need to continue to do in the private sector. One of the problems to make sure health care is affordable and available is the legal system. And, look, it's out of kilter. We want everybody to have justice. But unfortunately, particularly in medicine, there are too many frivolous and junk lawsuits that are running good doctors out of practice and running up the cost of medicine. Do you realize that in order to avoid lawsuits, many doctors practice what's called defensive medicine? In other words, they prescribe medicines that may not be necessary or procedures that may not be necessary, just in case they get hauled into the court of law. As a matter of fact, it's estimated that the defensive practice of medicine costs your Federal Government, costs you, the taxpayer, $28 billion a year.

Now, when I first went to Washington, I said, "Well, this is an issue that ought to be solved at the State level," until I realized the budgetary impact that these lawsuits are having on you, the taxpayer. And so I went to Congress and worked with the House, and we got a good medical liability reform law out of the House. Unfortunately, it's stuck in the Senate. The trial lawyers are tough in Washington, by the way; they really don't want to see medical liability reform. But if you're interested in making sure the system works, if you want people to have access to affordable health care and have doctors that are around to practice to begin with, you need to have strong medical liability reform in order to make the health care system work.

Thirdly, have you ever watched how these files work in medicine? We're going to talk to Dr. Dean here in a minute. Her penmanship is probably pretty good—[*laughter*]—but most doctors don't write too well, and yet they write a lot in files. What I'm telling you is, medicine is really behind the times when it comes to information technology. And one of the things we'll talk about here is how to use information technology to wring the costs out of medicine and yet be able to deliver good quality care to our citizens.

It's estimated that between 25—that we can reduce costs by 25 to 30 percent with the advent of what we call medical—electric medical records, so each person has got their own electronic medical record that you've got data on. In other words, we'll be passing information from provider to provider via the Internet, via new technology as opposed to handwritten files that are carried from one office to the other. We're going to spend some time talking about that. It is a practical way to help control medical costs so people have got health care that's available and affordable.

Fourthly, we've got to make sure that we have plans that encourage consumer saving, in other words, insurance plans, products for people to be able to use in order to get health care that encourages savings. One idea is health savings accounts. These are plans where you buy a high-deductible catastrophic plan. You contribute money tax-free, but you're the consumer—you're the decisionmaker when it comes to health care. You decide. You decide what doctor you see.

Think about the system today as a third-party payer. How many of you have got insurance, and you never really cared about the cost because somebody else is paying the bill, right? You don't really care about the quality because some person in an office somewhere

is paying the bill on your behalf. It's called a third-party payer system. It's the prevalent system today.

One of the things we're trying to encourage is the design of new opportunities for citizens to be able to get quality health care where they're in charge of the decision-making, that encourages people to make rational savings. If we have more consumer involvement in health care, then it makes sense—if that's the goal—then it makes sense to make sure that consumers have got rational data from which to make choices. And that's not the case today in medicine, really, when you think about it.

I don't know how many of you all have ever said, "Gosh, I wonder how much this procedure is going to cost me," or, "Before I go to see this person, I want to know how much it costs," or, "Maybe I need to know what this hospital charges." I doubt many of you have done that. I think the new trend in medicine is going to be to encourage transparency in pricing as well as transparency in quality. And that's the subject of today's discussion. How do we encourage consumerism. What do you do? Well, one thing you do is you make sure people understand their options, how much something costs. And if they decide to make a purchase, what do they expect; what are the expectations from the consumer?

The Federal Government has got a lot to do with this because we spend a lot of money in health care, when you really think about Medicaid and Medicare, veterans' benefits, Department of Defense. And one of the initiatives Mike is now going to undertake is to say, "In order to do business with the Federal Government, you've got to show us your prices and you've got to help us develop a qualitative standard so the people that we're trying to help know what they're getting."

And so here are some practical ways to address the rising cost of medicine. These are ways that basically say, we want you, the consumer, in charge, that there is such thing as a market, and that markets function. You remember Lasik surgery, eye surgery? It's a place where—it was a procedure that cost a lot of money when it first came on, and yet there was quite a bit of competition. People said, "Look, I'm good at this. Why don't you come to my shop." Or you noticed docs were advertising. All of a sudden the cost of laser surgery has dropped precipitously. It's now affordable procedure. Markets work when consumers have got options to make in the marketplace.

And that's what this Executive order is going to do. I'm going to have Mike describe the Executive order to you here in a minute. But it's an order that basically commits the Federal Government to work with State and local and docs and hospitals to lead the way, to be a part of this new movement about transparency in pricing and quality.

Have I done it all right?

Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt. You've done a good job, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

The President. That's what he's supposed to say.

[*At this point, Secretary Leavitt made brief remarks.*]

The President. There's a lot of savings, by the way, when you're not writing things down on paper. Just ask some of the more modern businesses here in Minnesota, where you're unemployment rate is, like, really low because of the productivity of your companies. One reason why is, they use information technology.

Sorry, Secretary.

[*Secretary Leavitt made further remarks.*]

The President. Yes. Why don't you talk to them about electronic medical records? I didn't do a very good job of describing it.

Secretary Leavitt. When——

The President. I'll give it a stab, and then you come back in.

Secretary Leavitt. All right. Got you. [*Laughter*]

The President. So one of these days, you're going to have all your medical records on a little key that you can then plug into a computer, and all of a sudden, information is at the provider's fingertips, which makes the system a lot more efficient, which means less costly, but also saves on medical errors. But the problem we face is that the—we've got to develop a standard language. Medicine is a fairly complicated—got a complicated

dictionary, let's put it that way. So what's the procedure on that, Mike?

[*Secretary Leavitt made further remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Secretary Leavitt. My mother went to the doctor the other day. She told me that she filled out her name, address, insurance company name, birth date, telephone number—seven different times. Now, that's not necessary——

The President. My mother wouldn't have been so patient as your mother. [*Laughter*] I hope she's not watching. [*Laughter*] Good job, Michael.

Michael Howe is an interesting character here. He is an entrepreneur who's come up with a unique idea on how to help people have affordable and available health care.

Michael, did you start your deal—like, are you the classic entrepreneur, start in the garage?

Michael Howe. No, actually, I have to give credit; there were other groups. There were physicians and entrepreneurs that devised the mechanism, devised the innovation that MinuteClinic really represents.

The President. Okay, well, tell people what MinuteClinic is. If you haven't heard about it, it's worth listening.

[*Mr. Howe, chief executive officer, MinuteClinic, made brief remarks.*]

The President. What's process management? Tell people what that is.

Mr. Howe. Well, the interesting thing is, you can go through, and when you do something—strep test, a strep throat test—if you do thousands of strep throat tests, you can——

The President. You've got a problem, if there's thousands of strep tests. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Howe. You do. You have a problem. But you also have an opportunity.

The President. Yes, right. Okay. [*Laughter*] That's the spirit. [*Laughter*] Sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Howe. No, no, it's all right. You have an opportunity to measure the effectiveness of one provider versus the next. You have an opportunity to measure treatment protocols.

[*Mr. Howe made further remarks.*]

The President. So do you have one in a shopping mall?

Mr. Howe. Absolutely. We have one in the Eden Prairie Mall right over here in Minnesota.

The President. Really? Isn't that interesting.

Mr. Howe. And the idea——

The President. A person walking down there looking, and says, "Here's the—if you need help, here are the costs."

Mr. Howe. That's right.

The President. Posted right there for them to see on——

Mr. Howe. Absolutely. And to compare it to where they go. It's also right-sized. And what I mean by that, it's a small facility. It's focused on a very specific scope of practice; common family ailments that some estimates are as high as 40 percent of the medical visits in today's society, are covered by these conditions.

So this is an opportunity to provide a higher quality care, transparent pricing, but also much more affordable. Our prices are 40 to 50 percent of what it would cost anywhere else.

The President. And are people going?

Mr. Howe. Well, in the last 6 years, we've completed 500,000 patient visits; we've had no malpractice claims; consumers tell us that their patient satisfaction runs between 97 and 98 percent; 99.6 percent of our patients tell us they'd use the service again, refer it to family and friend. Clearly, the providers we selected do a tremendous job making the emotional connection that delivers the end result that we're really looking for.

[*Mr. Howe made further remarks.*]

The President. Well, in order to have electronic medical records, there has to be a standardization in medicine to begin with.

You know, it's interesting, isn't it; it's an interesting idea he had, and it's meeting a consumer need. That stands in stark contrast to the government making the decisions for you, is to make different options available to patients. And you're providing health care at a 40 percent or 50 percent——

Mr. Howe. It's half the cost.

The President. Yes, it's great. Thanks for doing what you're doing. And you're in other States?

Mr. Howe. Yes, we have 86 clinics across 11 States at this point. We anticipate some very significant growth over the next few years.

The President. Yes, you ought to.

Mr. Howe. We're going to drive them very hard.

The President. Nothing better than being with an entrepreneur, isn't it? [*Laughter*] Thanks, Michael.

Marilyn, thanks for joining us.

Marilyn Carlson Nelson. Delighted to be here.

The President. We're thrilled you're here—Chairman of the Board, CEO of one of Minnesota's great companies, Carlson Companies. Thanks for joining us. What's on your mind?

Ms. Carlson Nelson. Well, first of all, I want to say thank you. I think we've been waiting at Carlson and in this community for about 20 years to hear what we've just heard, and that is inoperability, standards, quality standards, incentives.

At Carlson, we've worked with the Business Health Care Action Group for—I think we started almost 20 years ago now—to look at how to incentivize providers to have more transparency. We've worked on involving and engaging our employee base in preventative—various kinds of preventative activities. But recently we've put in several innovations—one, I have to say, a MinuteClinic in our headquarters.

The President. You saved 50 percent, I hope? [*Laughter*]

Ms. Carlson Nelson. Actually, we did the research. It looked as if a cost to us and our employees was about $40 to $50 through MinuteClinic for this certain set of services; it was, like, $100 in the doctor's office, and dramatically more than that in the emergency room, where a lot of people end up going for that kind of care.

[*Ms. Carlson Nelson, chairman of the board, chief executive officer, and president, Carlson Companies, made brief remarks.*]

The President. This is an issue that we're focusing on the core problem, and that is, we're dealing with an industry that really is not modern, that needs help in the legal profession, and that needs more consumerism. You know, you mentioned preventative health. Nothing that will cause somebody to take good care of their body than a—than having an insurance program that encourages savings. You make rational decisions and you exercise and you don't smoke and watch your drinking; it's amazing how your health improves. If you walk 2 miles every day, it really makes a big difference.

And if you have policies that say there's an incentive for you, you benefit from making that kind of rational decision, you monetarily benefit—like the health savings accounts, it helps with prevention. If people really watched what they ate, it's amazing how health care costs would also go down in America as well.

Yes, Michael.

Secretary Leavitt. Mr. President, there is—this is a good thing for our health, and it's a good thing for the system. It's also an economic imperative that we do it.

The President. Yes.

Secretary Leavitt. What Ms. Carlson suggested, I'm hearing from employers all over the country. Health care is now 16 percent of our gross domestic product, and it's headed for 20 percent. And there's really not a place on the economic leader board for a country that continues to spend more and more and more in one sector.

I was looking at the—and it's hitting consumers. I was looking in my home State at the teachers. They've got the largest increase——

The President. What is your home State?

Secretary Leavitt. That's Utah, by the way. [*Laughter*] And yet the teachers, many of them end up having less take-home pay because of the cost of health care.

[*Secretary Leavitt made further remarks.*]

The President. Jim Chase, what do you do, Jim?

Jim Chase. Well, Mr. President, I work with an organization here in Minnesota that's been working on many of the things that you and Secretary Leavitt have talked about, and we're quite excited to have you here today.

[*Jim Chase, executive director, MN Community Measurement made brief remarks.*]

The President. And so, like, what is your group—what's the name of your group?

Mr. Chase. We're called Minnesota——

The President. I know, but—[*laughter*].

Mr. Chase Minnesota Community Measurement. We're a non-profit that's been together for about 3 years.

The President. Really? And so the local folks came together and said, "Let's give old Jim some work and figure out how to do—[*laughter*]—have a health care system that works well."

Mr. Chase. My work came later. [*Laughter*] But I think what's exciting is that we're actually seeing some changes now. Being able to measure this, we're seeing the results change. And it's very encouraging, I think, for the providers out there who are—that's what they were in this for, was to find ways to treat their patients better.

[*Mr. Chase made further remarks.*]

The President. So, like, how many community measurement groups are there in the country, do you suspect? It sounds like it's pretty unique.

Mr. Chase. Yes. There are several that have started. In fact, we're pleased to be working with Secretary Leavitt in the Ambulatory Quality Alliance that has formed nationally, that are bringing together, to start with, six sites around the country that are in various stages of pulling together this kind of information.

[*Mr. Chase made further remarks.*]

The President. Good work. Thanks. It must be exciting to be, kind of, on the leading edge of substantial change.

Mr. Chase. It keeps us busy. [*Laughter*]

The President. That's good. I know the feeling. [*Laughter*]

We are joined by Dr. Laura Dean, ob-gyn. I will start off by telling you a startling statistic: There are 1,600 counties in the United States without an ob-gyn. I mean, we're talking about availability and affordability; obviously, 1,600 counties have got a serious problem.

Thanks for hanging in there.

Laura Dean. You're welcome.

The President. A lot of ob-gyns are leaving the practice because they're getting sued out of existence, pure and simple. I can't put it any more plainly than that. If you want to have ob-gyns in America, we need medical liability reform to protect these good people.

Step up, Doc. How long have you been practicing?

Dr. Dean. I've been practicing obstetrics and gynecology for 10 years in the community of Stillwater, and I've delivered more than 1,500 babies.

The President. Really?

Dr. Dean. Yes, sir.

The President. That's good. [*Laughter*] What's on your mind?

Dr. Dean. Well, I, certainly, as a physician, my goal is to help my patients make good decisions about their health care. And I'm excited about what you're here to talk about today, because I've been providing them with all kinds of medical information to help make decisions, but the financial piece has been missing. And people need that piece in order to make good and whole decisions.

The President. So, like, are you going to put on the window, you know, Dr. Laura Dean, 100 bucks? [*Laughter*] How does it—are you an individual practitioner?

Dr. Dean. I'm in a group practice with family practice doctors, other ob-gyns, internists, pediatricians.

[*Dr. Dean, ob-gyn, Stillwater Medical Group and Lakeview Hospital, made brief remarks.*]

The President. See, it's interesting, isn't it, kind of a mindset change. It used to be you'd go in and just take whatever they gave you, because somebody else is paying the bill. And if we can get a system down where people are able to have a good program, a good product, good insurance, but where the consumer has more to say with what's purchased or not, all of a sudden the dynamic begins to change, and costs begin to go down. You know, the good doc here volunteered to us all you don't need this procedure.

That cost—that saves money over time. The whole system benefits if we have a thousand providers making that same decision on an hourly basis. And so what Laura is saying is, if consumers have more information from

which to make decisions, all of a sudden, costs begin to become less of a burden on the system, I think is what you're saying.

Dr. Dean. Absolutely.

The President. Lawsuits bothering you? Obviously, look, I led the witness. [*Laughter*] Not even a lawyer, and I led the witness. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Dean. Certainly it is something looming over the heads of physicians every day, the thought about lawsuits, really—maybe ordering tests to protect yourself and to make sure. I have many colleagues similar in age to me, which is not real old yet, in practice of medicine——

The President. Twenty-seven. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Dean. ——who have stopped delivering babies, who have stopped performing surgery.

The President. It's a problem; you've got a problem. It is a problem when society starts losing good souls that otherwise would be obgyns. It's a real problem, and we better do something about it. It's one thing to have good law; we want good law. But these frivolous lawsuits are a real problem for the people of Minnesota and all across the United States. It's serious business. These trial lawyers need to back off, and these politicians in the United States Senate, people like Coleman, need to step up, and he will. [*Laughter*] And he has.

No, he's been strong, he's been strong on medical liability reform. I'm not trying to turn this thing into a political deal. I'm just telling you, for the sake of this country, for the sake of good medicine, we better get some good medical liability reform out of the United States Senate.

Thanks, Dr. Dean.

Dr. Dean. Thank you.

The President. Thanks for practicing. One of the wonderful things about America is, our health care providers are fantastic people. They really are decent, honorable people who've answered a higher calling. And we appreciate—[*inaudible*].

Dr. Dean. Thank you. Thank you, sir.

The President. Speaking about a higher calling, Jane Brown, executive director, Second Harvest Heartland. Has anybody ever heard of Second Harvest Heartland? Good. So you don't need to tell them what you do. Actually, you're feeding people who need help.

Rachel "Jane" Brown. That's correct, sir.

The President. Actually, if people need—I presume it's okay for me to say, you could use some contributions?

Ms. Brown. Oh, my, yes. That's a wonderful thing for you to say. [*Laughter*]

The President. Seriously. I know—I know Marilyn will help you. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Brown. Thank you for that.

The President. She has.

Ms. Carlson Nelson. Yes. [*Laughter*]

The President. She has been helping, as has corporate Minnesota.

Ms. Brown. Yes, corporate Minnesota has been very good to us. And the Carlson Companies are wonderful.

Second Harvest Heartland is a food bank, and we have 800 agencies that get their food from us, so every little bit helps, so thank you for that.

The President. Yes. Well, we were talking—actually, the reason that this subject came up is, I was asking her whether or not she had enough product to help people who need help, and the answer is, never enough.

Ms. Brown. Never enough, no, nowhere near enough yet.

The President. Yes. But you've done some interesting things through health care.

Ms. Brown. We have. We have—Marilyn and I were contrasting—she has a huge company; there are 76 employees at Second Harvest Heartland and 66 who receive their health insurance through our organization. And this last year, we offered an HSA for the first time as one of the options, and 15 percent—or 10 of those employees—opted to take it. And I'm one of those who opted to take it.

The President. Everybody understand what that is? It's, again, a high-deductible catastrophic plan, and that the person and/or company can put money in tax-free to cover up to the deductible.

Ms. Brown. That's great.

The President. Which actually saves money.

Ms. Brown. It saves money. It does so many things, and that's why we've chosen it.

[*Ms. Brown, executive director, Second Harvest Heartland, made brief remarks.*]

The President. And you contribute into the savings account?

Ms. Brown. Yes. As the employer, yes, we do.

The President. One hundred percent?

Ms. Brown. No. It's a shared responsibility, and that's very important, that there's a shared responsibility in that.

[*Ms. Brown made further remarks.*]

The President. Right, right. This is a—Jane has given her employees a very interesting option, and that is a consumer-driven plan where there is a incentive to save, to be a good shopper, and to make rational choices about how you live your life. And if you live a healthy lifestyle, you're going to spend less money out of the money she has contributed into their health account. But the money is yours. In other words, there's a catastrophic plan available; you may pay the first 3,000—the $3,000 is on the company, and anything above $3,000 goes to the insurance company.

So you can see, if you don't spend the $3,000, and you're able to roll it over, tax-free, and then there's another 3,000 contributed next year, and you roll over money you save, pretty soon you've got a good health savings account, because the Government doesn't tax any of it. It doesn't tax the money going in; it doesn't tax the earnings; and it doesn't tax the money coming out.

And if you change jobs—by the way, which is an interesting statistic in our society today. Somebody told me the other day that people change jobs about eight times before they're 32 years old. That wasn't the case when we were growing up.

Ms. Brown. No, it wasn't. [*Laughter*]

The President. Anyway, doesn't it make sense to have a plan that you can carry with you? That's called portability. And so what Jane has provided her employees is something that encourages consumerism but also helps meet their needs, and that's what medicine has got to do. It's got to meet the needs of the consumer, not the government. And that's what we're talking about, innovative ideas, innovative ways to help control costs in health care.

And I hope you've gained something from this conversation. At the very least, please leave with the notion that we're thinking differently, because you need to think differently. The system right now needs reform and needs to be fixed. And you're fortunate in the State of Minnesota that you've got leadership at the State and local and the corporate and individual level that is willing to think differently to help a new system evolve. And it's coming, and it's going to make a huge difference for people's lives.

And I want to thank all our panelists for joining us today. It's been a fascinating conversation. God bless you all.

Oh, wait a minute, now I'm going to sign an Executive order. And I think you'll find this interesting. It doesn't take very long, and we usually have people stand behind me when I do it. [*Laughter*]

You ready, Pawlenty?

[*The President signed the Executive order.*]

The President. Done.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:41 p.m. at the Minneapolis Marriott Southwest. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Jan Callison of Minnetonka, MN.

Executive Order 13410—Promoting Quality and Efficient Health Care in Federal Government Administered or Sponsored Health Care Programs

August 22, 2006

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, and in order to promote federally led efforts to implement more transparent and high-quality health care, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. *Purpose.* It is the purpose of this order to ensure that health care programs administered or sponsored by the Federal Government promote quality and efficient delivery of health care through the use of health information technology, transparency regarding health care quality and price, and better incentives for program beneficiaries, enrollees, and providers. It is the further purpose of this order to make relevant information available to these beneficiaries, enrollees, and providers in a readily useable manner and in collaboration with

similar initiatives in the private sector and non-Federal public sector. Consistent with the purpose of improving the quality and efficiency of health care, the actions and steps taken by Federal Government agencies should not incur additional costs for the Federal Government.

Sec. 2. *Definitions.* For purposes of this order:

(a) "Agency" means an agency of the Federal Government that administers or sponsors a Federal health care program.

(b) "Federal health care program" means the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program, the Medicare program, programs operated directly by the Indian Health Service, the TRICARE program for the Department of Defense and other uniformed services, and the health care program operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. For purposes of this order, "Federal health care program" does not include State operated or funded federally subsidized programs such as Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or services provided to Department of Veterans' Affairs beneficiaries under 38 U.S.C. 1703.

(c) "Interoperability" means the ability to communicate and exchange data accurately, effectively, securely, and consistently with different information technology systems, software applications, and networks in various settings, and exchange data such that clinical or operational purpose and meaning of the data are preserved and unaltered.

(d) "Recognized interoperability standards" means interoperability standards recognized by the Secretary of Health and Human Services (the "Secretary"), in accordance with guidance developed by the Secretary, as existing on the date of the implementation, acquisition, or upgrade of health information technology systems under subsections (1) or (2) of section 3(a) of this order.

Sec. 3. *Directives for Agencies.* Agencies shall perform the following functions:

(a) Health Information Technology.

(1) For Federal Agencies. As each agency implements, acquires, or upgrades health information technology systems used for the direct exchange of health information between agencies and with non-Federal entities, it shall utilize, where available, health information technology systems and products that meet recognized interoperability standards.

(2) For Contracting Purposes. Each agency shall require in contracts or agreements with health care providers, health plans, or health insurance issuers that as each provider, plan, or issuer implements, acquires, or upgrades health information technology systems, it shall utilize, where available, health information technology systems and products that meet recognized interoperability standards.

(b) Transparency of Quality Measurements.

(1) In General. Each agency shall implement programs measuring the quality of services supplied by health care providers to the beneficiaries or enrollees of a Federal health care program. Such programs shall be based upon standards established by multi-stakeholder entities identified by the Secretary or by another agency subject to this order. Each agency shall develop its quality measurements in collaboration with similar initiatives in the private and non-Federal public sectors.

(2) Facilitation. An agency satisfies the requirements of this subsection if it participates in the aggregation of claims and other appropriate data for the purposes of quality measurement. Such aggregation shall be based upon standards established by multi-stakeholder entities identified by the Secretary or by another agency subject to this order.

(c) Transparency of Pricing Information. Each agency shall make available (or provide for the availability) to the beneficiaries or enrollees of a Federal health care program (and, at the option of the agency, to the public) the prices that it, its health insurance issuers, or its health insurance plans pay for procedures to providers in the health care program with which the agency, issuer, or plan contracts. Each agency shall also, in collaboration with multi-stakeholder groups

such as those described in subsection (b)(1), participate in the development of information regarding the overall costs of services for common episodes of care and the treatment of common chronic diseases.

(d) Promoting Quality and Efficiency of Care. Each agency shall develop and identify, for beneficiaries, enrollees, and providers, approaches that encourage and facilitate the provision and receipt of high-quality and efficient health care. Such approaches may include pay-for-performance models of reimbursement consistent with current law. An agency will satisfy the requirements of this subsection if it makes available to beneficiaries or enrollees consumer-directed health care insurance products.

Sec. 4. *Implementation Date.* Agencies shall comply with the requirements of this order by January 1, 2007.

Sec. 5. *Administration and Judicial Review.*

(a) This order does not assume or rely upon additional Federal resources or spending to promote quality and efficient health care. Further, the actions directed by this order shall be carried out subject to the availability of appropriations and to the maximum extent permitted by law.

(b) This order shall be implemented in new contracts or new contract cycles as they may be renewed from time to time. Renegotiation outside of the normal contract cycle processes should be avoided.

(c) This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

George W. Bush

The White House,
August 22, 2006.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., August 25, 2006]

NOTE: This Executive order was published in the *Federal Register* on August 28.

Proclamation 8041—Minority Enterprise Development Week, 2006

August 22, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During Minority Enterprise Development Week, we celebrate the outstanding progress made by minority business owners, recognize their important contributions to our Nation's vibrant economy, and emphasize our commitment to helping them succeed.

Throughout our country, minority entrepreneurs strengthen our economic growth and keep our Nation moving forward. As Ronald Reagan said, entrepreneurs are the "explorers of the modern era," and minority business owners help expand opportunities for their communities and their fellow citizens. A free society in which people have the opportunity to pursue their goals, no matter who they are or where they are from, is a stronger and more just society.

Over the past 3 years, our economy has grown by nearly $1.3 trillion, and minority businesses have contributed to that growth. Since 2001, my Administration has worked with the Congress to deliver the largest tax relief in two decades, leaving more money for minority business owners to reinvest. We are also undertaking initiatives to widen the ownership of businesses. With these resources, minority enterprises are hiring more employees, improving their communities, and helping fuel our country's economic resurgence.

Minority businesses throughout our Nation remain strong, and our country benefits from the positive impact they have on our economy. Minority business owners represent the hopeful spirit of America, and all across this land, Americans continue to achieve their dreams and build better futures for themselves and their families. During Minority Enterprise Development Week, we underscore our commitment to helping entrepreneurs realize the promise of our great Nation.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by

the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim August 27 through September 2, 2006, as Minority Enterprise Development Week. I call upon all Americans to celebrate this week with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities to recognize the many contributions of our Nation's minority enterprises.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-second day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-first.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:46 a.m., August 24, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was release by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 23, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on August 25.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Rockey Vaccarella

August 23, 2006

The President. I just had coffee with Rockey Vaccarella, St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. He caught my attention because he decided to come up to Washington, DC, and make it clear to me and others here in the Government that there's people down there still hurting in south Louisiana and along the gulf coast.

And Roc is a plain-spoken guy. He's the kind of fellow I feel comfortable talking to. I told him that I understand that there's people down there that still need help. And I told him the Federal Government will work with the State and local authorities to get the help to them as quickly as possible.

Rockey Vaccarella. That's right.

The President. He met with my friend Don Powell. Don's job is to cut through bureaucracy. I told Rockey the first obligation of the Federal Government is to write a check big enough to help the people down there. And I want to thank the Members of Congress of both political parties that helped us pass over $110 billion of appropriations. And that's going to help the folks. And I told him that to the extent that there's still bureaucratic hurdles and the need for the Federal Government to help eradicate those hurdles, we want to do that.

Now, I know we're coming up on the first-year anniversary of Katrina, and it's a time to remember, a time to particularly remember the suffering that people went through. Rockey lost everything. He lost—he and his family had every possession they had wiped out. And it's a time to remember that people suffer, and it's a time to recommit ourselves to helping them. But I also want people to remember that a one-year anniversary is just that, because it's going to require a long time to help these people rebuild.

And thank you for your spirit.

Mr. Vaccarella. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. It's an amazing country, isn't it, where——

Mr. Vaccarella. It is. You know, it's really amazing when a small man like me from St. Bernard Parish can meet the President of the United States. The President is a people person. I knew that from the beginning. I was confident that I could meet President Bush.

And my mission was very simple. I wanted to thank President Bush for the millions of FEMA trailers that were brought down there. They gave roofs over people's head. People had the chance to have baths—air condition. We have TV; we have toiletry; we have things that are necessities that we can live upon.

But now, I wanted to remind the President that the job's not done, and he knows that. And I just don't want the Government and President Bush to forget about us. And I just wish the President could have another term in Washington.

The President. Wait a minute. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vaccarella. You know, I wish you had another 4 years, man. If we had this President for another 4 years, I think we'd be great. But we're going to move on.

Mr. President, it's been my pleasure.

The President. You're a good man, Rockey. Thank you all.

Mr. Vaccarella. You are too. Thanks a bunch.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on France's Decision To Send Troops to Lebanon in Support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701

August 24, 2006

I welcome President Chirac's decision to send a total of 2,000 troops to Lebanon and to continue to exercise leadership on the ground in enforcing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. This is an important step towards finalizing preparations to deploy the United Nations Interim Force of Lebanon. I applaud the decision of France, as well as the significant pledges from Italy and our other important allies. I encourage other nations to make contributions as well. We are working with the United Nations and our partners to ensure the rapid deployment of this force to help Lebanon's legitimate armed forces restore the sovereignty of its democratic Government throughout the country and stop Hizballah from acting as a state within a state.

NOTE: The statement referred to President Jacques Chirac of France.

Notice—Intention To Enter Into a Free Trade Agreement With Colombia

August 24, 2006

Consistent with section 2105(a)(1)(A) of the Trade Act of 2002, I have notified the Congress of my intention to enter into a free trade agreement with the Republic of Colombia.

Consistent with section 2105(a)(1)(A) of that Act, this notice shall be published in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

The White House,
August 24, 2006.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., August 25, 2006]

NOTE: This notice was published in the *Federal Register* on August 28.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Notice of Intention To Enter Into a Free Trade Agreement With Colombia

August 24, 2006

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Consistent with section 2105(a)(1)(A) of the Trade Act of 2002, (Public Law 107–210) (the "Trade Act"), I am pleased to notify the Congress of my intention to enter into a free trade agreement with the Republic of Colombia.

The United States-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement will generate export opportunities for U.S. farmers, ranchers, and companies, help create jobs in the United States, and help American consumers save money while offering them more choices. The Agreement will also benefit the people of Colombia by providing economic opportunity and by strengthening democracy.

Consistent with the Trade Act, I am sending this notification at least 90 days in advance of signing the Agreement. My Administration looks forward to working with the Congress in developing appropriate legislation to approve and implement this Agreement.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this letter.

Message on the 90th Anniversary of the National Park Service

August 24, 2006

I send greetings to those celebrating the 90th anniversary of the National Park Service.

Americans take great pride in our country's natural and historic treasures, and the National Park Service plays an important role in ensuring that our rich heritage is preserved and enjoyed for generations to come. Since its establishment in 1916, the National Park Service has grown to include almost 400 sites, with parks in nearly every state. These parks protect beautiful landscapes, tell important stories about our country's past, and encourage our citizens to conserve our natural environment and celebrate our national history.

Over the past five years, the National Park Service has made significant progress in conserving our natural resources and improving the condition of park facilities. I call on all Americans to help in these efforts and to enhance our parks as we get ready for the National Park Services' centennial celebration. Through continued cooperation and partnership, our national parks can endure for the next 100 years and beyond.

I appreciate the volunteers and employees of the National Park Service who dedicate their time and talents to maintaining and enhancing our national parks. Your efforts help advance environmental stewardship, promote outdoor recreation, and preserve our national memory.

Laura and I send our best wishes on this special occasion.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 25. An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Memorandum on the Future of America's National Parks

August 24, 2006

Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior

Subject: The Future of America's National Parks

In honoring its 90th anniversary, I have called on the National Park Service, and every American, to continue the cooperation necessary for our vibrant national parks to endure for the next 100 years and beyond.

Over the past 5 years, the National Park Service has built a strong foundation for the future, with 6,000 park improvements completed or underway. We should further enhance our national parks during the decade leading up to the 2016 centennial celebration.

Therefore, I direct you to establish specific performance goals for our national parks that, when achieved, will help prepare them for another century of conservation, preservation, and enjoyment. These goals should integrate the assessments of the past 5 years used in monitoring natural resources and improving the condition of park facilities. You are to identify signature projects and programs that are consistent with these goals and that continue the National Park Service legacy of leveraging philanthropic, partnership, and government investments for the benefit of national parks and their visitors.

You are directed to consult with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality as appropriate in implementing this memorandum. I encourage you to invite and receive suggestions from those who desire to preserve the scenic, cultural, historical, geological, and recreational values of our national parks.

You are to report the results of the implementation of this memorandum to me by May 31, 2007.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 25. An original was not available for verification of the content of this memorandum.

Proclamation 8042—National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, 2006

August 25, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Alcohol and drug abuse disrupts families, threatens the safety of our neighborhoods, and ruins the lives of countless men, women, and youth. During National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, we recognize the damaging effects of substance abuse and renew our support for individuals battling to overcome addiction. The theme for 2006, "Join the Voices for Recovery: Build a Stronger, Healthier Community," urges all Americans to help prevent alcohol and drug abuse and to promote treatment and recovery options.

While drug use among youth is down since 2001, we must continue our efforts to help our next generation avoid substance abuse. This work begins with understanding that youth are less likely to engage in risky behaviors when they are connected to strong families and communities. To assist our children in learning to make healthy choices, the Helping America's Youth initiative, led by First Lady Laura Bush, is encouraging local partnerships that empower families, schools, and communities to help our young people reach their full potential.

In order to effectively battle alcohol and drug addiction, we must ensure that Americans in need can readily access services and programs. Over the past 3 years, my Administration has provided nearly $300 million for the Access to Recovery program so that individuals who desire treatment have the ability to seek the form of treatment most suitable for their needs, including assistance from faith-based and community providers. My fiscal year 2007 budget proposes to build upon the success of this initiative by providing $98 million to further expand individual choice.

My Administration is also committed to protecting our citizens and our young people from the scourge of methamphetamine. This substance is highly addictive and is a continuing and devastating threat in too many communities across our Nation. While the number of teens who have ever tried this deadly drug has decreased since 2001, we remain focused on keeping methamphetamine from reaching more Americans. Through the Access to Recovery program, $25 million will be targeted in fiscal year 2007 to help individuals recover from methamphetamine abuse. Additionally, earlier this year I signed into law the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005, which increases penalties for smuggling and selling methamphetamine and introduces commonsense safeguards to make many of the ingredients used in manufacturing it harder to obtain and easier to track.

These efforts are helping in the fight against substance abuse in America, yet government action is not the only answer. We are making progress because there are millions of our fellow citizens answering the universal call to love a neighbor. To find out how to join the armies of compassion and be a part of building a stronger, healthier community, interested volunteers should visit recoverymonth.gov and usafreedomcorps.gov. By working together, we can make a difference in the life of someone in need and help fulfill the promise of a more hopeful tomorrow for generations to come.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 2006 as National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-fifth day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-first.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 9:10 a.m., August 29, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on August 30.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

August 19

In the morning, at Camp David, MD, the President had an intelligence briefing.

August 20

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC.

August 21

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

August 22

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with the Homeland Security Council to discuss avian influenza.

Also in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Minnetonka, MN, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer David Jewison. Later, he traveled to Wayzata, MN, where he visited Glaciers Custard and Coffee Cafe. Then, at a private residence, he attended a reception for congressional candidate Michelle Bachmann.

In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC.

The President announced his intention to nominate Charles L. Glazer to be Ambassador to El Salvador.

The President announced his intention to appoint Dennis Prager as a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the Board of Trustees of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: Edward William Easton; James A. Haslam II; Helen Lee Henderson; Nancy G. Kinder; Michael Frederic Neidorff; and Dean A. Spanos.

August 23

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the Oval Office, he met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Then, in the Map Room, he participated in separate interviews with WWL–TV, WVUE–TV, and WGNO–TV of New Orleans, LA, and WLOX–TV of Biloxi, MS.

Also in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan to discuss U.S.-Pakistani relations and regional issues. He also had a telephone conversation with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to discuss U.N. peacekeeping efforts in Lebanon and the situations in Iran and Darfur, Sudan.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Alexandria, VA, where, at a private residence, he attended a reception for senatorial candidate George Allen.

In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC.

August 24

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Kennebunk, ME, where, at Sea Road School, he met with family members of military personnel killed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and during the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Also in the morning, the President had separate telephone conversations with Prime Minister Romano Prodi of Italy and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany to discuss the situations in Lebanon and Iran.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to the Bush family home in Kennebunkport, ME.

August 25

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

The White House announced that the President and Mrs. Bush will host a White House Summit on Malaria in December.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released August 21

Fact sheet: United States Humanitarian, Reconstruction, and Security Assistance to Lebanon

Released August 22

Transcript of a press briefing by Gulf Coast Region Recovery and Rebuilding Coordinator Donald E. Powell, Federal Emergency Management Under Secretary R. David Paulison, and Army Corps of Engineers Commanding General and Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Carl A. Strock

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Dana Perino and Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt

Fact sheet: Health Care Transparency: Empowering Consumers To Save on Quality Care

Released August 23

Transcript of a press briefing by Deputy Press Secretary Dana Perino

Released August 24

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Dana Perino

Fact sheet: The One-Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

Released August 25

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President and Mrs. Bush will host a White House Summit on Malaria in December

Acts Approved by the President

NOTE: No acts approved by the President were received by the Office of the Federal Register during the period covered by this issue.

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